





# Action Inquiry



**TIMELY AND TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERSHIP**

**LEARNING ACTION INQUIRY LEADERSHIP SKILLS**

**TRANSFORMING ORGANIZATIONS**

**ACTION AWARENESS OF ALCHEMISTS**



# Timely and Transformational Leadership



## PRODUCTIVE AND SELF-ASSESSING

- Action inquiry is a way of learning anew, in the vividness of each moment, how best to act now.
- Action inquiry is behavior that does several things at once. It listens into the developing situation. It accomplishes whatever tasks appear to have priority, and it invites a re-visioning of the task (and of our own action.)
- Anyone can become more effectively and transformingly powerful by practicing action inquiry.
- Action inquiry is a lifelong process of transformational learning that individuals, teams, and whole organizations can undertake if they wish to become: 1) Increasingly capable of making future visions come true 2) Increasingly alert to the dangers and opportunities of the present moment 3) Increasingly capable of performing in effective and transformational ways.
- “The ability to notice with immediacy what is going on in me has been, I would honestly say, the most important ingredient in the progress of my personal development.” - Bill Tolbert

## DETATCH FROM, INQUIRE, AND ADJUST ACTION IN PRESENT CIRCUMSTANCES

- This process not only allows us to correct errors before they have negative consequences, but can also be experienced as pleasurable, energizing, and creates a positive climate for ongoing learning.
- Action inquiry becomes a moment-to-moment way of living whereby we attune ourselves through inquiry to acting in an increasingly timely and wise fashion.
- To inquire in action is just to be more sensitive and alive to the muchness of the moment.
- This deeper spiritual presence or super-vision is not based on a self-image, but rather on experiencing the actual exchange occurring.

# Timely and Transformational Leadership



## SINGLE, DOUBLE, AND TRIPLE LOOP AWARENESS

- Aspire to engage in first-person action inquiry that tests given theories in all moments of real time.
- Receive and digest three types of feedback:
  1. Single-loop feedback about results in the outside world that require us to change behaviors if we wish to achieve our goal more efficiently.
  2. Double-loop feedback about what goals and strategies we may need to change to become more effective.
  3. Triple-loop feedback about what quality of ongoing awareness we need to cultivate in order to embrace the four territories of experience and test the legitimacy and integrity of our actions.

## FOUR TERRITORIES OF EXPERIENCE

- Our attention, our strategies, our actions, and our outcomes.
- The first step is to begin to recognize how limited our ordinary attention and awareness is. The second step is to begin exercising our awareness in new ways in the midst of challenging situations.
- Our super-vision: intentional movement among the other three territories of experience and across more than one at a time.
- First territory- Outside events: results, assessments, observed behavioral consequences, environmental effects.
- Second territory- Own sensed performance: behavior, skills, pattern of activity, deeds, as sensed in the process of enactment.
- Third territory- Action logics: strategies, schemes, ploys, game plans, typical modes of reflecting on experience.
- Fourth territory- Intentional attention: presence awareness, vision, intuition, aims.



# Learning Action Inquiry



## LEADERSHIP SKILLS TO BECOME CREDIBLE AND SUSTAINABLE

- Respond in a timely way to emergencies or opportunities.
- Accomplish routine, role-defined responsibilities.
- Define and implement major, strategic initiatives.
- Clarify organizational mission and encouraging continual improvement of the alignment among mission, strategy, operations, and outcomes.

## MANY THINGS GO ON IN US THAT ESCAPE OUR AWARENESS

- As you transition from one activity to another, bring the transition into your awareness by noticing how you feel about ending the previous activity and beginning the next one.
- Check in with yourself daily to identify the moment that was the most and least satisfying to you. Pause to articulate to yourself what made it so.
- Develop the habit of noticing how you are feeling after each meaningful interaction you have with another person.
- “The worst thing is that we live in a contaminated moral environment. We fell morally ill because we got used to saying something different from what we thought. We learned not to believe in anything, to ignore each other, to care only for ourselves.” - Vaclav Havel
- Taking the spirit of inquiry seriously is as profound a spiritual commitment as one can make, a faith in seeing our performances across all four territories of experience (“presencing”).
- Action inquiry is the hardest thing in the world to do on a continuing basis.

# Learning Action Inquiry



## ACTION INQUIRY AS A MATTER OF SPEAKING

- Begin to inquire of yourself, “What is the worst that could happen if I put myself ‘on pause’ next time?” Imagine a chain of events that might follow such a pause.
- “What seems to be ‘at risk’ for me at those times I want to rush in?”
- When you have exercised this self-awareness for a while, you will be able to choose when to pause, and timely action inquiry will help you decide a strategy, instead of an unconscious strategy deciding itself for you.
- Our diplomacy can be a mask for fear, hurt, or anger we do not healthily express at the time it is aroused. We first need practice unmasking the feelings to ourselves.
- Look at our own actions and see how we are part of the problem and practice “emotional jujitsu.”
- Identify perceptions as perceptions, rather than as immutable realities, and discuss differences in perceptions explicitly.

## LEVELS OF ACTION LOGIC

- The Opportunist treats the physical or outside world as the primary reality and concentrates on gaining control of things there.
- The Diplomat treats his or her own sensed performance as what really matters.
- The Expert treats the strategy as the primary reality and concentrates on mastering his cognitive grasp of one or more particular disciplines.
- The Achiever concentrates on making incremental, single-loop changes in behavior to eventually reach the planned results.
- The Alchemist’s interest in this fresh quality of awareness is not as a means to something else, but as an end in itself.



# Transforming Organizations



## LEAD MEETINGS AS DEVELOPMENTAL PROCESSES

- Conception—generating a surprisingly creative new vision.
- Investments—helping others to join and own the issue.
- Incorporation—something being produced; the vision becoming real.
- Experiments—exploring many implications of the vision.
- Imagine how much more interesting and productive business meetings would be if more executives were this creative in managing them.

## COLLABORATIVE INQUIRY

- Quality of engagement of a CEO, with humility and fierce resolve, is a critical factor in sustained organizational transformations.
- In learning organizations, openness to questioning exists, assumptions are tested, mistakes are rarely punished but are a basis for further learning, new knowledge is shared, and new knowledge is gained collaboratively.
- Four leadership roles of a meeting: “Meeting Leader,” “Decision Clarifier and Codifier,” “Process Facilitator,” and “Clown.”
- Very few companies have the vision, the will, or the resources to evolve to Collaborative Inquiry action-logic.
- The full promise and power of action inquiry blossoms when it is a collaborative engagement that enriches your life.
- CEOs become highly effective at leading organizational transformation, because they are less attached to their own frames, and more aware of how people, organizations, and societies journey through different frames and action-logics over time.
- A genuine learning organization encourages the practice of developmental action inquiry among its members and is actively open to re-examining and transforming its own assumptions about its environment, its structure, and its strategies.

# Action Awareness of Alchemists



## SELF-AWARENESS IN ACTION

- A finite game is played for the purpose of winning, an infinite game for the purpose of continuing the play. Finite players play within boundaries; infinite players play with boundaries.
- Why is it so rare to find anyone amidst the power brokers of organizational life who seems genuinely fresh, authentic, unassuming, good humored, timely, and acting to align personal, organizational, societal, and global goods?
- In an Alchemist we find a sense of leisure, playfulness, or meditateness at times; a sense of urgency, fierce efficiency, or craft like concentration on others.
- “Work/play” is a term that comes closer to describing interweaving of business, art, and leisure in these peoples’ lives.
- By standing in the tension of opposites, the powerless can generate a power that can change society.
- Listening, with a sense of wonder repeatedly reawakening in body, heart, and mind, the Alchemist experiences the rhythms, the lives, and the setting of a particular conversation.

## SELF-INQUIRIES

- What is one specific quality about this person that I really appreciate? How might I cultivate that quality in myself?
- How do I name the specific quality of this person that irritates me? Can I look in the mirror and discover where I also have that irritating quality? How might I befriend and transform this?
- What is one item of knowledge or experience that person has, that I don’t have?
- “The appearance in us of what is really true, our nature, is not a comfortable experience.” - John Pentland
- A reframing spirit continually overcomes itself, awakening to its own presuppositions.



# Action Awareness of Alchemists



## UNEXAMINED ACTION-LOGIC SEVERELY LIMITS OUR EFFECTIVENESS

- Action inquiry begins because we (any one of us, or any family, or organization) experience some sort of gap between what we wish to do and what we are able to do.
- Conscious living requires that we carefully attend from the inside-out to the experiences we have, hoping to learn from them and modify our actions and even our way of thinking as a result.
- The secret of timely action inquiry is to be awake enough in present time to engage in action inquiry intentionally.
- This learning process is not a mechanistic, automated feedback process producing continuous change, but is instead a bumpy, discontinuous, sometimes upending, and transformational kind of learning.
- Write a critical/constructive autobiography, (possibly in dialogue with a mentor or executive coach).

## THE STRATEGIST

- How else may we develop true, ethical integrity except by the compassionate, unsparing observation of our lack of integrity?
- Inquiry creates a new and different future in our personal daily lives each time we awaken and intentionally practice it rather than acting unconsciously, habitually, and without inquiry.
- The person with the Strategist worldview sees purpose in life beyond meeting his own needs. Continuing development of self and others is a primary concern.
- The Strategist seeks to discover what he does uniquely well. This person is involved in a personal quest—a life work—with a sense of vocation. This quest may be focused within the workplace, outside it, or both.
- The Strategist seeks out practices intended to heighten awareness and attunement at each moment.